

Concert Program for November 26, 27, and 28, 2010

Leonard Slatkin, conductor
Olga Kern, piano

ARVO PÄRT *Fratres* for String Orchestra and Percussion (1977, rev. 1992)
(b. 1935)

RACHMANINOFF *Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini, op. 43* (1934)
(1873-1943)
Olga Kern, piano

Intermission

PROKOFIEV *Symphony No. 5 in B-flat major, op. 100* (1944)
(1891-1953)
Andante
Allegro marcato
Adagio
Allegro giocoso

Leonard Slatkin is brought to you through the generosity of the Whitaker Foundation as part of the Whitaker Guest Artist Series.

Olga Kern is the Felix and Eleanor Slatkin Guest Artist.

The concert of Friday, November 26, is underwritten in part by a generous gift from Mr. and Mrs. Jack Bodine.

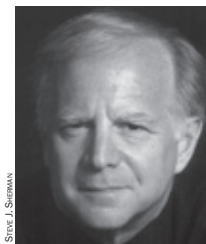
The concert of Saturday, November 27, is underwritten in part by a generous gift from Mr. and Mrs. Michael F. Neidorff.

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Steve J. Sherman

Leonard Slatkin Whitaker Guest Artist

Internationally acclaimed American conductor Leonard Slatkin began his appointment as Music Director of the Detroit Symphony Orchestra in September of 2008. He was recently named Music Director of the Orchestre National de Lyon (ONL), France, beginning with the 2011-12 season. In addition, Slatkin continues to serve as Principal Guest Conductor of the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra, a post that began in the fall of 2008.

Following a 17-year tenure as Music Director of the St. Louis Symphony, Slatkin became Music Director of the National Symphony Orchestra in Washington, D.C. in 1996. Other positions in the United States have included Principal Guest Conductor of the Minnesota Orchestra, where he founded its Sommerfest; first Music Director of the Cleveland Orchestra's summer series at the Blossom Music Festival, a post he held for nine years; Principal Guest Conductor of the Los Angeles Philharmonic Orchestra at the Hollywood Bowl for three seasons; and additional positions with the New Orleans Philharmonic and the Nashville Symphony Orchestra.

His engagements for the 2010-11 season include return appearances with the Dresden Staatskapelle, Orchestre Philharmonique de Radio France, Orchestre National de Lyon, Leipzig Gewandhaus, Orquesta Nacional de España (Madrid), and the Orquesta Simfònica de Barcelona. He will appear with many leading North American ensembles including the Los Angeles Philharmonic, Seattle Symphony, Toronto Symphony, Nashville Symphony, and Pittsburgh Symphony.

Throughout his career, Slatkin has demonstrated a continuing commitment to arts education and to reaching diverse audiences. He is the founder and director of the National Conducting Institute, an advanced career development program for rising conductors. Additionally, Slatkin founded the St. Louis Symphony Youth Orchestra and has also worked with student orchestras across the United States, and he works frequently with youth orchestras across America and abroad. Slatkin reaches out to younger musicians and music teachers through the NSO American Residencies program and regularly addresses and mentors public and private school students of all ages.

Born in Los Angeles to a distinguished musical family, his parents were the conductor-violinist Felix Slatkin and cellist Eleanor Aller, founding members of the famed Hollywood String Quartet. Slatkin began his musical studies on the violin and studied conducting with his father, followed by Walter Susskind at the Aspen Music Festival and School and Jean Morel at the Juilliard School. He is the proud parent of a teenage son, Daniel.

Leonard Slatkin most recently conducted the St. Louis Symphony in October 2007.



FRANCO BUI

Olga Kern Felix and Eleanor Slatkin Guest Artist

Now recognized as one of her generation's great pianists, Olga Kern's career began one decade ago with her award winning gold-medal performance at the 11th Van Cliburn International Piano Competition in 2001. Her second catapulting triumph came in New York City on May 4, 2004, with a highly acclaimed New York City recital debut at Carnegie's Zankel Hall. In an unprecedented turn of events, Kern gave a second recital eight days later in Isaac Stern Auditorium at the invitation of Carnegie Hall.

This season, the Dallas Symphony Orchestra and Van Cliburn Foundation will honor Kern's Cliburn victory with a co-presentation of her talents in March and April of 2011. Also this season, Kern will perform with the symphonies of Detroit, Anchorage, Nashville, Dallas, Virginia, Rochester, Pittsburgh, Madison, Johnson City, Syracuse, and Colorado. She has also been invited to perform at Longwood Gardens, the Sanibel Music Festival, the Winter Park Bach Festival, the Royal Conservatory of Music in Toronto, and Drake University. In January 2012 Kern will perform during a special North American recital tour with violinist Vladimir Spivakov, their first chamber music collaboration outside of Europe. In the 2009-10 season, Kern performed all of the Rachmaninoff concertos in residence with the Colorado Symphony, made her debut with the New Jersey Symphony, and performed in several special event concerts with famed soprano Kathleen Battle. Summer 2009 brought Kern her fourth re-engagement at the Ravinia Festival for Rachmaninoff's Piano Concerto No. 1 with the Chicago Symphony under the baton of James Conlon. She performed additionally at the Brevard Music Festival, International Keyboard Institute, and gave a recital and master classes in New York City.

Kern was born into a family of musicians with direct links to Tchaikovsky and Rachmaninoff and began studying piano at the age of five. Winner of the first Rachmaninoff International Piano Competition when she was 17, she is a laureate of 11 international competitions and has toured throughout her native Russia, Europe, and the United States, as well as in Japan, South Africa, and South Korea. The recipient of an honorary scholarship from the President of Russia in 1996, she is a member of Russia's International Academy of Arts. She began her formal training with acclaimed teacher Evgeny Timakin at the Moscow Central School and continued with Professor Sergei Dorensky at the Moscow Tchaikovsky Conservatory, where she was also a postgraduate student. She also studied with Boris Petrushansky at the acclaimed Accademia Pianistica Incontri col Maestro in Imola, Italy.

Kern is a Yamaha Artist and her Yamaha CFX Concert Grand Piano is provided courtesy of Yamaha Corporation of America and Piano Distributors in Chesterfield, Missouri.

Olga Kern debuts with the St. Louis Symphony this week.

Music and Metaphysics

BY PAUL SCHIAVO

Ideas at Play

The three composers represented on the program of our concert have much in common. Two are Russians, the third a native Estonian who came to maturity when his country was part of the Soviet bloc. Inevitably, their lives were strongly affected by the tumultuous political events that shook Russia and Eastern Europe during the 20th century. As a result, all three left their homelands to live and work in the West, though one of them returned to the Soviet Union—a deeply consequential decision.

Yet political matters find no reflection in the music of these composers—as they do in the work of another major Russian musician of the last century, Dmitry Shostakovich. Instead, the pieces we hear address, in different ways, metaphysical concerns. The Estonian Arvo Pärt writes music of spare, luminous beauty and evident spirituality. Serge Rachmaninoff's distinctly Russian Romanticism combines effusive emotional expression with a sober fatalism conveyed through his adoption of a funeral chant as a kind of personal *momento mori*. And Sergey Prokofiev's Symphony No. 5 conveys an optimistic humanism in terms that might be deemed a spiritual affirmation.

Arvo Pärt *Fratres* for String Orchestra and Percussion

Born: Paide, Estonia, September 11, 1935 **Now resides:** Berlin **First performance:** an earlier version of the work was premiered on April 29, 1983, in Stockholm **STL Symphony premiere:** March 23, 1995, Leonard Slatkin conducting the only previous performance of this version of *Fratres* **Scoring:** Claves, bass drum, and strings **Performance time:** Approximately 10 minutes



Tony Foxes

Arvo Pärt

In Context 1992 *Eight former Soviet republics join the United Nations; Soviet newspaper Pravda suspends publication; Sarajevo under siege*

During the last three decades, Arvo Pärt has won a devoted following among listeners entranced by his music written in a style that has been called “mystical minimalism.” The composer came to that style by way of a long and somewhat circuitous artistic journey. Born in Estonia and trained at the conservatory in Tallinn, that nation’s capital, Pärt began composing in the 1950s in a manner indebted to Shostakovich and Prokofiev. During the ensuing decade he adopted an extremely formalized style of composition employing 12-tone series, rigorous contrapuntal procedures, and mathematically related rhythms. The result was music of a highly abstruse modernist sensibility.

But in the 1970s Pärt found his true compositional voice. Abandoning atonal formalism, he turned instead to spare sonorities and luminous textures in conjunction with simple and often repetitive melodic figures, static harmonies, and steady rhythmic pulses. The resulting sound inevitably led to comparisons with the minimalism of such American composers as Steve Reich and Philip Glass. But there are significant differences. Whereas American minimalism typically presents a quick micro-pulse and busy rhythmic surface, Pärt's compositions generally cultivate a slow, meditative quality and often evoke the sound of medieval chant.

Moreover, many of the works Pärt has written during the past three decades are settings of sacred texts. The composer is a deeply religious man who regularly attends services at the great Russian Orthodox Church in Berlin, where he has lived with his family since 1981. Since then, religious works have assumed an ever greater part in his oeuvre and have come to form the most substantial body of sacred music by any major composer of our time.

Fratres, which opens our concert, is not one of Pärt's ecclesiastical works, but it does evoke an atmosphere of meditative spirituality. The composer initially wrote this piece in 1977, arranging it at that time for several different ensembles. Over the ensuing years he has continued to create different renditions of the work, which now total 15 distinct scorings. If any of these can be considered the standard version of the piece, it is probably the one for string orchestra and percussion, written in 1992, and played here. In addition to being among the most frequently performed iterations of *Fratres*, this arrangement arguably realizes the character of the music more effectively than any other. That character can be described as contemplative, ethereal, and vaguely medieval.

The Music: The title of this composition is a Latin word meaning "brethren," and it is not difficult to imagine the music of *Fratres* as the chanting of a monastic brotherhood. Typical of Pärt's later work, the texture and unfolding are simple and exceptionally clear. There are three elements. One is a low drone, sustained by basses and cellos from the first moments of the piece to the last. Another is the part of the percussion instruments, claves and bass drum, which periodically sound a figure of three notes, repeated at once. Though quiet and austere, this is like a call to attention, or maybe a ritual summons to prayer.

In answer to that call, violins and violas play what seems like choral chanting, the third ingredient of the composition. With each new phrase (initiated by the unvarying percussion motto), their music grows in volume and sonority. At the midpoint of the work Pärt simply reverses course, affecting a long diminuendo back to the hushed level of the opening. The piece thus describes a single broad sonic arch, one that rises from quietude to fullness and back. The simplicity of this formal scheme is in keeping with the simplicity of the harmonic and textural aspects of the music. But simple is by no means the same as artless. For all its apparent modesty of expression and design, *Fratres* is strangely and powerfully affecting, and it is not surprising that it has become one of Pärt's best-known compositions.

Serge Rachmaninoff *Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini*, op. 43

Born: Oneg, near Novgorod, Russia, April 1, 1873 **Died:** Beverly Hills, California, March 28, 1943 **First performance:** November 7, 1934, in Baltimore; the composer, a superb pianist, played the solo part, and Leopold Stokowski conducted the Philadelphia Orchestra **STL Symphony premiere:** December 14, 1934, Rachmaninoff was soloist, with Vladimir Golschmann conducting **Most recent STL Symphony performance:** May 22, 2009, Natasha Paremski was soloist, with Ward Stare conducting a Casual Classics concert **Scoring:** Solo piano and an orchestra of two flutes and piccolo, two oboes and English horn, two clarinets, two bassoons, four horns, two trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani and percussion, harp, and strings **Performance time:** Approximately 22 minutes



Rachmaninoff

In Context 1934 *Adolf Hitler* voted into power in Germany; *Dust Bowl* decimates southwestern United States; bank robbers *Bonnie Parker* and *Clyde Barrow* are gunned down in Louisiana

Like Arvo Pärt, Serge Rachmaninoff followed a path that led from East to West. A brilliant student, Rachmaninoff graduated from the St. Petersburg Conservatory with high honors in both piano performance and composition. Initially pursuing a career in Russia, he soon took to concertizing in, and composing for, Western Europe and the United States. (His first American tour came in 1909.) Following the Revolution of 1917, the composer left Russia permanently. Eventually he settled in this country and became an American citizen.

Rachmaninoff composed his *Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini* during a month of concentrated work in the summer of 1934, and he appeared as piano soloist with the Philadelphia Orchestra in the premiere performance the following November. This and subsequent presentations in both America (including a performance with the St. Louis Symphony at Kiel Auditorium) and Europe met with exceptional success, and the work has remained one of Rachmaninoff's most popular compositions.

The Music: The title “Rhapsody,” which implies a kind of spontaneous and loosely structured composition, is a misnomer that fails to credit the carefully planned architecture of this music. Formally, the piece presents a set of variations on a melody by the 19th-century violin virtuoso Nicolò Paganini. (This theme has attracted other composers, most famously Liszt, who transcribed it for piano as one of his *Grand Etudes after Paganini*, and Brahms, who used it as the subject of his *Variations on a Theme of Paganini*, op. 35.) At the same time, the work's scoring for solo piano and orchestra gives the impression of a concerto, an impression reinforced by the overall shape of the piece. It begins and ends with series of fast variations framing a central group in slower tempo, an arrangement that mirrors the usual three movement, fast-slow-fast, concerto format.

Rachmaninoff refrains from presenting the Paganini melody at the outset, where we would normally expect it, beginning instead with a brief introduction followed by the first of 24 variations. Only with this first

variation concluded does the theme itself appear in the violins. With the seventh variation, the composer introduces a new thematic element. While cellos and bassoons play a paraphrase of the Paganini melody, the piano presents an ancient plainsong melody. It is the *Dies irae*, the traditional chant for the dead, simply but eloquently harmonized. That theme, which Rachmaninoff quoted in several other compositions and thereby made something of a musical signature, reappears in the 10th variation.

The variation that follows is essentially an accompanied cadenza for the soloist and marks the beginning of the more leisurely “middle movement.” This section concludes with a wonderfully lyric 18th variation, which features the type of memorable, song-like melody for the piano that Rachmaninoff wrote so well. Thereafter the music grows increasingly brilliant and energetic, closing with a dramatic recurrence of the *Dies irae* melody played against a variant of the Paganini theme during the final variation.

Sergey Prokofiev Symphony No. 5 in B-flat major, op. 100

Born: Sontsovka, Ukraine, April 23, 1891 **Died:** Moscow, March 5, 1953 **First performance:** January 13, 1945, in Moscow; the composer conducted the USSR State Symphony Orchestra **STL Symphony premiere:** November 1, 1946, Vladimir Golschmann conducting **Most recent STL Symphony performance:** April 18, 2008, Carlos Kalmar conducting **Scoring:** Three flutes and piccolo; three oboes and English horn; four clarinets, including E-flat and bass clarinet; three bassoons and contrabassoon, four horns, three trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani and percussion, harp, piano, and strings **Performance time:** Approximately 46 minutes



Prokofiev

In Context 1944 *Soviet troops enter Poland; Allied forces invade occupied France on D-Day; Martha Graham ballet Appalachian Spring, with music by Aaron Copland, premieres in Washington D.C.*

Sergey Prokofiev also left Russia in 1918, in the wake of the country’s epochal Revolution. But unlike Rachmaninoff, who was publicly and unalterably opposed to the Soviet regime, Prokofiev returned to his homeland after a decade and a half of living in the West. He spent his final years as one of the Soviet Union’s leading composers.

Prokofiev wrote his Symphony No. 5 during the summer of 1944, which he spent at the Soviet Composers’ Retreat near the city of Ivanovo. “I conceived it,” he later declared, “as a symphony of the grandeur of the human spirit.”

We can be more specific about the impulse behind this work. Prokofiev was famously apolitical and self-absorbed, with only the most superficial awareness of the larger events of his day, but even he was deeply affected when Hitler invaded the Soviet Union, in June 1941. Now, three years later, the tide of the conflict had turned decisively. Although Ivanovo lies well east of Moscow and therefore escaped the devastation that the war had inflicted on much of the Soviet Union, Prokofiev could not have been unmindful of the military struggle still going on, nor of the triumph that was at last in sight. Both the accessible style of the Fifth Symphony and its unmistakable

feeling of optimism suggest that the “human spirit” it extols is that of the Russian people in their hour of victory.

This notion received a kind of uncanny confirmation when Prokofiev conducted the premiere performance, in Moscow, on January 13, 1945. Sviatoslav Richter, the great Soviet pianist, was present on the occasion and remembered that “when Prokofiev had taken his place on the podium and silence reigned in the hall, artillery salvos suddenly thundered forth. His baton was raised. He waited and began only after the cannons had stopped. There was something very significant in this, something symbolic. It was as if all of us—including Prokofiev—had reached some kind of shared turning point.”

The cannonade that delayed the performance that day was ceremonial, signaling that the Red Army had begun crossing the Vistula into Nazi Germany. For the Soviet people, it marked the regaining of their country. The same might be said for Prokofiev. The Symphony No. 5 proved to be his most successful work since his return to the Soviet Union in the mid-1930s, a work in which he reached out to a large audience of his compatriots on a high artistic level. It is widely regarded as his finest symphonic score.

The Music: The symphony could not commence in a more direct fashion. Without fanfare or introduction, the main theme of the opening movement sounds in the flute and bassoon. Prokofiev explores this melody at length before presenting a second subject in the oboes and flutes. The development of these ideas proves extensive, frequently involving different thematic fragments set against each other in counterpoint. Although Prokofiev achieves a variety of moods, colors, and textures with these materials, the overall impression is one of epic grandeur. The movement concludes with a coda in which the initial theme soars above powerful hammer-blows from the percussion.

The scherzo-like second movement is a throwback to the style of Prokofiev’s pre-Soviet period. We hear not only his characteristic humor in the opening clarinet solo but the brittle textures, driving rhythms, and colorful, sometimes garish, orchestration that gained the composer notoriety during the 1920s.

There follows a lyrical Adagio whose principal melody first appears over an accompaniment of steady triplets in the strings. A contrasting central section moves toward darker thoughts, culminating in a climax of wrenching discords and anguished cries plummeting from the upper registers of the woodwinds. The abrupt and seemingly effortless return to the initial idea seems a sudden flood of sunlight over a cloud-darkened landscape.

A brief prelude in slow tempo, built around recollections of the symphony’s opening measures, introduces the finale. This movement also uses two principal subjects: a melody presented at the outset by Prokofiev’s favorite instrument, the clarinet; and a more pastoral idea heard in the flute and clarinet. These light-hearted themes alone might have imparted too carefree a character here, but Prokofiev balances them with a more sober thought that rises hymn-like from the low strings midway through the movement.